

Strength

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Summary: After the Phantom Menace, Obi-Wan must find a way to deal with his grief. Severe angst.

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DISCLAIMER: They're George Lucas'. He created them and he owns them. I don't want to keep them, just borrow them for a while. I am making no money from this story.

> RATING: PG. Very angsty and miserable. You have been warned.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I suppose you could call this the other side of "The Other Side". If you've read it you'll probably know what I mean. It's a different way of dealing with the same issue, this time from Obi-Wan's point of view. I've been trying to get this finished for a long, long time.

> The last line of this fic is taken almost exactly from Savage Garden's "Two Beds and a Coffee Machine," an excellent song. They just said exactly what I wanted to say better than I could. Their song "Crash and Burn" was also a great inspiration.
 I dedicate this fic to the members of the Fanfix message board, a very supportive, talented and inspirational group of friends and authors. Thanks for all your help and encouragement.

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> Strength

> "He will bring balance. Train him...."
 And my Master breathes his last breath and closes his eyes for the last time. My heart breaks. For the first time since I can remember, I am alone in the galaxy. I hold Qui-Gon's body in my arms and try to fight back the tears that come to my eyes.

> I fail. Just like I failed my master. The tears flow down my cheeks and onto Qui-Gon's noble face. I am alone. The dreadful memories are

playing back in my mind, over and over again. Falling... How could I have been so weak? Running... Arriving just a moment too late. If only I'd been faster...
 Why did it have to be him? I don't care what he thought, he was a much better man than I am. He was a much better Jedi than me. Why couldn't it have been me that took the blow? I would take it gladly to save my master. I would take it many times over only to know that he is safe.

> The laser walls stop buzzing. They have cycled down. Gathering my mental strength, I stand and look back at Qui-Gon's body. I am reluctant to leave. My heart is here, with him, broken. I can't leave him. Yet I must. I could take him to the medical facility, but I should inform the Queen first...
 The Queen! Anakin! How can I tell them? I must find them! I run away from that dreadful place, where the terrible duel was fought, with that one thought in my mind.

> I still can't believe he's gone. I fight the urge to run back to Qui-Gon, to take him in my arms again, to hope, impossibly, that he will open his eyes, or speak to me. He didn't even say goodbye...
 Where do I go? Where would the Queen be? It must be a long time since we left her. She must be worried. People are walking around everywhere, some rejoicing, some sorrowful. I guess the Naboo won. In my sorrow I had forgotten about the battle. I look around, bewildered. Where should I go? What should I do?

> For a moment I feel like a child again, lost and confused, waiting for Qui-Gon to come and guide me, or answer my questions. Qui-Gon... My face crumples, and I turn quickly to the wall, not allowing my lack of composure to be seen. I clench my fists, working on controlling my turbulent emotions.
 "Jedi Kenobi?"

> I spin around, a neutral expression on my face.
 "Captain Panaka." My voice sounds strange. It trembles. A concerned frown crosses the captain's face.

> "I've been searching for you. Here." He holds out a warm bundle. The cloaks...
 I fight back the tears that threaten to fall and slip my cloak onto my shoulders. I take the darker garment gently in my arms.

> "Jedi Kenobi, is your master..."
 His voice trails off. He doesn't know how to say it. He's seen the dried tears on my face, the moisture in my eyes. I wipe my eyes angrily. Then I nod, wishing it were not so, wishing that I could say 'no...'

> "Captain...Tell me, where can I find the Queen? I... must tell her."
 "In her throne room." He smiles kindly at me, and I nod again.

> Which way to the throne room? I feel so lost, like I'm walking around in a haze. I can't seem to see or hear properly, locked up in a world of my own. A world full of pain. I bump into something, and come back to reality. People are giving me strange looks, and I can see them whispering among themselves. They are wondering at my tear-streaked, sweaty face. They don't know about the terrible battle...
 Tears threaten to flow again. I pull my hood up over my head, so no one can see my face.

> The throne room's that way. I can remember now. She's there, Amidala and maybe Anakin. Anakin. How can I tell him? He'll hate me for it. This is all such a mess. A month ago, I'd never heard the name Anakin Skywalker. I'd never even thought of going to Naboo. I'd never met Queen Amidala, or had anything to do with the Neimoidian's Trade Federation. I'd always had Qui-Gon to talk to. Now I'm here, and I have no one. Even yesterday, things were relatively normal. We were in the Naboo swamp, preparing for battle. I knew there was danger, but I'd never thought of having to train Anakin. I never thought I'd lose my master...
 Oh no. I'm here. Muttering

something to the guard. I can't even remember what I said. Why does this have to hurt so much? Why couldn't I just catch up and fight beside him? Why did I have to let him be killed? I am a failure. Tears. I must fight them. Can't let my emotions show. Must hide them before I face the Queen. I close my eyes and choke back the tears threatening to pour down my face.

> "Jedi Kenobi," the guard says. "The Queen will see you now."
 "Thank you." The words sound strange, detached. How can I say that when my master is dead? How can I ever be thankful again? I step forward, into the throne room. Queen Amidala's there, with her handmaidens. The Queen's still dressed as PadmÃ©. Anakin's not there. Where is he? Do I have to do this twice? How can I tell him?

> I look at the floor so Queen Amidala can't see my face.
 "Jedi Kenobi," the Queen says in her regal tones. "We won!"

> She drops her royal air and bounds forward to greet me, like the joyous teenager that she is. She reaches out to embrace me, then stops. She's sensed that something's wrong.
 "What..." She sounds stricken. I hate to hurt her like this. I must hide my feelings. I can't let others be saddened by me. I'm not supposed to give in to my feelings. That is weakness. My job is to help, not to sadden or burden. "Where's Master Qui..."

> I close my eyes, collecting myself, then throw back my hood. I want to tell her this face to face.
 "No..." she whispers. She must have seen the dried tears on my cheeks, the sadness in my eyes. I must hide my feelings. I can't let my emotions show. I push them back finally, clearing the sorrow from my face, pushing it from my voice.

> "He's dead." My voice sounds cold, strong. I must not burden others. I will not.
 Amidala's face softens. Her expression is one of pain, sorrow and..... sympathy? I don't need sympathy. This is all my fault.

> "Obi-Wan," she says, dropping my formal title. "I know this must be hard for you."
 "No," I say bitterly. "Why would it be?"

> The queen pauses for a moment, trying to read my expression. I keep all emotions from showing in my face.
 "Don't be bitter," she says finally. "Qui-Gon wouldn't want you to."

> "What would you know about what he wants?" I snap at her.
 Amidala steps away from me, shocked at my reaction. Forgetting etiquette, I take advantage of her shock and run. All I want is to get away, to leave this terrible pain in my heart behind me, to get away from this torture in my mind.

> "Obi-Wan!" Amidala yells after me. I can hear her running behind me, but she can't catch me. I have been trained as a Jedi, trained by the best there is...
 Or was. Why couldn't I run this fast when I had to catch up with Qui-Gon? The ironic thought flashes through my head, bringing back the painful memories. I can't fight them. Overwhelmed, I stop running and everything catches up with me. The memories, the guilt, the pain, the torture all flood in on me until I feel like I'm going to explode.

> I start at a gentle touch on my shoulder, and bewildered, look up into the brown eyes of Queen Amidala. There are tears brimming in them. I close my own eyes and begin to sob. Amidala gently reaches out to put her arms around me. I cringe at her touch, but let her hold me.
 I let out all my grief, pain and guilt. Amidala stands with me, ignoring her duties to be my friend. I have so much pain to release that I think the tears will never cease, but they finally do. Exhausted by the full extent of my sorrow, I stand in Amidala's arms for a while. I know she must have a lot of questions to ask, a lot of things to do, but she leaves them for now.

> Amidala is a great friend. I never realised it before. I was

foolish, but now I know I can rely on her to help me in times of need. I twist out of her arms and whisper my thanks.
 "Your Highness, I can't tell you how much you've helped."
> "I think I know," she replies with a sad smile.
 I sigh. The battle has finally caught up with me now that my emotional pain has eased. The torture eating away at my heart has lessened to a dull ache, but now my body is beginning to hurt. That, however, I can deal with.
> Amidala notes my exhaustion and maybe even my pain.
 "You really should rest, Obi-Wan. Do you want to see the medics?"
> I shake my head. I'll be all right now. Amidala's help has given me strength. It will be a long time before the pain goes away, and I will never forget my Master. I wouldn't want to forget him, but it will be painful for a long time. But I'll be a stronger man when it's over, and I know I'll make it through.

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End
file.